

DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP

A monthly magazine devoted to the collecting, preservation and literature of the old-time dime and nickel novels, libraries and popular story papers.

Vol. 29 No. 6

June 15, 1961

Whole No. 345



DIME NOVEL SKETCHES #24

ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY

An attempt by Street & Smith to outdo Frank Tousey's Wild West Weekly. Lasted 175 issues, from April 23, 1904 to Aug. 24, 1907. Early issues featured "modernistic" covers, but soon changed to the more brightly colored covers of its contemporaries. 8x10, 32 pages.

TED STRONG AND HIS ROUGH RIDERS

By J. Edward Leithead

Some parts of this article on Rough Rider Weekly have appeared in other articles of mine about this neglected but, in my opinion, top-notch publication, but I also have additional information that hasn't appeared before. It was the first real attempt to bring the cowboy to an eminence and popularity equal to the Indian-fighting buckskin men who, nearly always the heroes in what were classified as "Indian stories," had practically held the center of the stage since the days of Cooper's Leather Stocking Tales. But dime novel readers, although quite familiar with cowboys and cattle mixed with their Indian raids, seemed not quite ready for a novel specializing, week after week, in stories of ranch and range life. Thus the Young Rough Riders were destined to last only 175 issues of a weekly that showed signs of often having rocky going.

The "boys of Black Mountain" had a creator who was really on his toes when he thought them up, Harry St. George Rathborne, who'd had experience writing all kinds of Westerns and some detective stuff (Old Broadbrim, for one). It would seem perfect timing to create such a character as Ted Strong, sergeant with Col. Roosevelt's Rough Riders in the Spanish-

American War, for when No. 1 of the Young Rough Riders Weekly was issued in 1904, the famous Teddy of the policy "speak softly and carry a big stick," always clad in Rough Rider uniform in cartoons, was almost universally popular in the U. S. A. He had been a rancher in the Bad Lands of Dakota, and Ted Strong, out of the service, turned cattleman, too, but none of this seemed to rub off on Rough Rider Weekly and make it zoom.

No doubt one reason for launching this publication was to give competition to Frank Tousey's Wild West Weekly, which had started publication in 1902. It is said that Cornelius Shea wrote all the Young Wild Wests (if he did, it was a feat almost matching Gil Patten's in the production of Merriwells), but I've also heard that the early stories were by H. K. Shackelford and a few by Laurana W. Sheldon (I'm nearly certain she wrote some). Important question: who created Young Wild West, Arietta Murdock and the rest of that memorable entourage, not the least being the clever Chinaman, Hop Wah? But did the better written Rough Rider tales by St. George Rathborne, and later W. Bert Foster and William Wallace Cook, give Cornelius Shea's

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hero and friends tough competition? They did not (and understand, I was a Young Wild West-Arietta Murdock fan, too, I liked them fine and read about them every week until the weekly started using small print and the covers "wasn't what they used to be"); the figures tell it best, I guess—against Rough Rider's handful of 175 issues, Wild West Weekly ran up a score of 644 issues before reprinting the stories from #2, and reaching a grand total of 1296 issues in 1927.

Ted Strong had inherited a cattle ranch in the Black Hills of Dakota from his grandfather. Young Rough Riders Weekly #1, Ted Strong's Rough Riders, or, The Boys of Black Mountain, opens with a letter from Ted to Ben Tremont, a good-natured, lazy giant and once famous college athlete, who had been in Ted's cavalry troop at San Juan Hill. Ben, then in New York, was invited to come West and help Ted fight for his "Black Mountain Ranch," to which a slick Eastern lawyer named Rossiter laid claim, principally because gold had been discovered on the ranch-land.

Kit Summers, another member of Ted Strong's Rough Rider troop in the war, fiery-tempered and wealthy, had already established himself and a crowd of Eastern boys on a cattle ranch not far from Black Mountain. The boys were a likeable bunch and they hung together through the series but without taking a prominent part such as fell to Bud Morgan, in the beginning the only genuine cowboy of the lot.

Bud wasn't working for Summers, but happened across Ted when the latter was looking for the saddle horses stolen from the Summers ranch, and after seeing how Ted could "shoot around a corner," in Rollstone Gulch, to nick a horse thief, Bud was Ted's pal for life. Older even than Ted Morgan wore his yellow hair long and was sometimes called "Gold-flocks." His favorite expression was "Jumpin' sandhills!" and he had a fund of tall tales about his experiences "down on the Pecos." He and

Ben Tremont were always feuding in a friendly way.

Then there was Stella Fosdick, the girl pard, but more about Stella at the place where she joined the Rough Riders.

Sheriff Roaring Bill Reynolds, of Crook County (one of those unforgettable characters who should have been carried through the series, perhaps on the villainous side, like Jack Sinn, the gambler, in Diamond Dick, Jr.) had established himself in Ted's Black Mountain Ranch, working for Lawyer Rossiter. Nicknamed "Roaring Bill," actually he was soft spoken but deadly, his idea of law and order being to let the desperado element do as it pleased. Crowfoot Bill and Cheyenne Dick, a half-breed, were his able lieutenants.

When Ted Strong, on arriving in Crook City, near the Black Mountain Ranch, discovered the lawless state of the country and that he would have to fight for his property, he organized Kit Summers and his crowd into a half-military outfit, the "Young Rough Riders"; Ted was captain, Ben came in, and Bud Morgan became Strong's right-hand man—he remained so to the last story published.

Lawyer Rossiter and his confederate, Sheriff Reynolds, lost out in their fight to keep Ted from rightful possession of Black Mountain Ranch, and the Summers outfit moved in with Ted. Three extra cowboys were hired to help with the cattle—Kid McCann, a fast gun as well as a top hand, Fox Quirk and Three-finger Ike.

Rossiter had a son, Earl, a vindictive enemy of Strong's. And Earl, after buying an outfit called "Sunset Ranch," carried on the fight with the Black Mountain "Rough Riders." His cousin, Louise Rossiter, a beautiful girl with none of the lawyer's or Earl's crooked streak in her, supplied romantic interest in many of the early stories. She and Ted first met at Rollstone Gulch when he and Bud Morgan recovered the Summers saddle horses; Louise and Ted liked each other immensely, and a couple of other girls, Kate Lamont and Daisy Mil-

ler, were introduced to heighten the love interest. Ted Strong, good-looking, good rider, roper and expert with guns, was a man's man who was also attractive to women. This helped to make Earl Rossiter, admirer of Louise, a good hater. There was more love interest in these early Rough Riders than was usual in a dime novel, particularly a Western, and Rathborne handled it very well. I think Louise should have been carried farther along in the series.

For thirty-seven issues the stories dealt mainly with adventures in the Black Hills country, fighting Roaring Bill's rustlers, fighting the Sioux under Chief Frosthead (a friend of Roaring Bill's), and opening the gold mine on Ted's land. A contest of cowboy sports between the Black Mountain and Sunset Ranches, in which Rossiter's outfit—this was a radical departure from the old formula of the hero always winning—came out on top, partly through superiority, partly skulduggery. Even the game and seasoned Bud Morgan lost the roping contest to a Mexican vaquero, was thrown in the bucking horse event. Ted was beaten at hog-tying when a "rogue" steer was turned loose by the Rossiter bunch; but Ted's ready gun saved the girl spectators when the steer charged the stands.

Besides these Black Hills adventures, the Rough Riders made trips into the Southwest to buy Texas cattle, hunted ladinos (wild stock) in the chaparral, got lost in the desert, battled bad men, took part in a land rush (this was exceptionally good, #22, Ted Strong's Land Boom, or, The Rush for a Homestead). They drove a beef herd to the Blackfoot Agency in Montana, nearly losing the herd to rustlers posing as trail-cutters (this was covered in two dandy issues, #6, Ted Strong on the Trail, or, The Cattlemen of Salt Licks and #7, Ted Strong in Montana, or, Trouble at the Blackfoot Agency). Much later they trailed their fall beef herd through Nebraska to Kansas City (#31, Ted Strong in Nebraska, or, The Trail to Fremont and #32,

Ted Strong in Kansas City, or, The Last of the Herd).

St. George Rathborne had seen them organize the "Young Rough Riders," recover Ted's Black Mountain Ranch, bring law and order to Crook County and deliver their first beef herd to the Kansas City stockyards. He was to see them through a few more adventures in Missouri, in Indiana and in Chicago. His last, for a time, was #37, The Young Rough Riders in Kansas, or, The Trail of the Outlaw. He'd done a swell job, he'd been doing some Buffalo Bill Stories at the same time, and presumably, since Col. Prentiss Ingraham died in 1904, there was a vacancy for a steady writer for the Buffalo Bill Stories that had to be filled, and Harry St. George Rathborne was the man to do it.

One thing about the Young Rough Riders Weekly that bothered me as a boy—and still does—is the unattractive covers on the early numbers. Usually it was a youthful cowboy on horseback; such a figure can be very expressive of action, but these definitely were not that kind. Some were afterward used as covers of early issues of Western Story Magazine and later, on a few of the Buffalo Bill Border Stories, and I can't understand what Street & Smith's art director could have been thinking of to use them at all. The artist I do not know by name, but he did a lot of Tip Top covers, and these were all right for the Merriwells (school, college, sports), but not for Wild West stuff. If the publishers were trying to put out a weekly with covers less "lurid" than their firmly established Western and detective libraries, something to appeal to the steady readers of Tip Top Weekly (who were sometimes rather superior about it and spoke of Buffalo Bill, Nick Carter and Diamond Dick as "blood and thunder"), S. & S. succeeded in sending Rough Rider to the newsstands in the duller wrappers since the salmon-colored Beadle wrappers (now the Beadle oldtimers will try to snipe me!). But it so happened

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C. G. MAYO

Wild Acres, Huntington, Vermont

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I should like to hear from anyone having the following for sale.

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"Leather Clad Tales," pub. by Frank F. Lovell Co. and U. S. Book Co.

C. G. MAYO

Wild Acres, Huntington, Vermont

that you couldn't judge these books by their covers, the stories themselves were quite up to the excitement standards of an old dime novel devotee like myself, who loves the lurid covers and as much blood and thunder as they want to pile on. There were, I will admit, two or three of these early covers that weren't too bad, but since it has been estimated that the cover of a novel was the reason for about 50% of its popularity, there had to be a change if Street & Smith aimed to give Wild West Weekly any competition.

Evidently this WAS their aim, though it may have been twofold, with an eye to interesting Tip Top readers in a Western type of magazine also. Wild West Weekly covers are well-known for their ably executed and exciting drawings (if we but knew the name of that artist!), and Street & Smith, with the issue numbered #42, The Young Rough Rider's Double, or, Unmasking A Sham, switched to the lurid type cover and never thereafter abandoned it. The cover of #42 was done by Marmaduke Russell, a top-notch; he did many others for Rough Rider and so did top-notchers like Charles L. Wrenn and Edward Johnson.

(to be continued)

NEWSY NEWS

by Ralph F. Cummings

Eli Messier awoke one morning to find Hunt Bros. Circus practically in his back yard. Took in all the shows and enjoyed 'em all.

Edwin Sommers, Box 103, Lexington, N. Y., says he lives 20 miles from Stamford, N. Y., Ned Buntline's old home town.

Ralph P. Smith reports that mail sent to Mr. J. W. Martin has been returned marked "deceased." Anyone in the San Francisco-Sacramento area who may be able to supply more details would oblige by dropping me a line. Ditto for Mr. B. D. Mallory of Culbertson, Nebraska.

Arthur Carter had a display of Tip Tops in a local bank in Attleboro.

Had many fine comments.

Harold Depolo, Old Lyme, Conn., writer of many Merriwell tales recently died at a ripe old age.

E. Marvin Smith says he is acquainted with the nephew of H. K. Shackelford who wrote many stories in Pluck and Luck, Boys of N. Y., and others.

Floyd Beagle died March 9, 1960, after a long illness. Mr. Beagle's daughter wrote Bill Burns about it. Floyd had a swell collection.

Frank Schott, 3809 N. 36th Street, Milwaukee, Wis., has again started a collection of old timers. Has a hobby of old firearms. Often visits Geo. Sahr and enjoys seeing his vast stock. If I don't write Frank soon he will sure think he's forgotten. Bear up Frank, will do, soon as I can find my pen.

Capt. Frank C. Acker is now in Germany, with the U. S. Navy. Frank loves Tarzan and Merriwell tales—why not write to him, Comnavnort APO 69, New York, N. Y.

Ed Sommers says he understands a movie was made about 1914, Frank Merriwell in Arizona. Posters are for sale by a party Ed knows. He wonders if any member knows about it.

Did you know Jas. Montgomery Flagg, the noted illustrator, died at the age of 82. He is the artist who changed the face of Uncle Sam. Sold his first sketch to the St. Nicholas Magazine at the age of 12. Drew many

EXCHANGE COLUMN

For Sale. 50 novels. All in fair to good shape, assorted kinds. My price. \$25.00. Bob Frye, 895 Morgan Ave., Schenectady 19, N. Y.

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of the posters during World War I.

By chance landed a real scarce one, not exactly a novel although it has Scott's Dime Novel Library, No. 10, across the front cover. Printed in 1860. Size 6x9, 32 pages, a few illustrations, sketch of Ossiah E. Dodge on the front cover. Short stories, etc. Published by Wright and Potter, No. 4 Spring Lane, Boston, Mass. Ralph Smith tells me it's a sort of subsidiary to Beadles Novel

Co., It's a real scarce one.

Ed Leithead getting great enjoyment from his grandchildren. Another bit of heaven dropped in to see him, a little girl presented by the proud father, his son Bill Cody Leithead. Often wonder how many Gram-paws we have in our Brotherhood. I might be one today if some babe among the many I met had said yes when I asked 'em. Too late now by gosh.

MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

10. John A. Reischmann, Box 466, Brandon, Fla. (New address)

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BOYS OF NEW YORK POCKET LIBRARY: 193. (Fair condition; \$1.00) 113 119 (good condition; \$1.50 each)

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Nature Magazine. (1926-1944). 210 numbers. Sample copy, 50c. The lot for \$60.00. Beautiful condition.

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RALPH P. SMITH

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